

## **Fighting Lessons by pokeasleepingsmaug**

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**Summary:**

Fighting lessons in the Wheelers backyard, because the three of them are still afraid even though the gate is closed.

## Fighting Lessons

He's had this fear in him, ever since the cabin, that someday Nancy would be without her handgun. He doesn't know how foolish this is, doesn't know she carries it tucked into the waistband of her pants nearly every day, the metal a cold kiss against the small of her back. He isn't as worried about Steve, because although Steve isn't a great fighter at least he knows how to throw a punch, and so one day when he drops Will off--a little early--he pulls Nancy into the backyard.

He has a roll of white athletic tape bought from the drugstore that he uses to wrap her knuckles, protecting the tender skin from splitting. He knows it's silly but her hands are lovely, one of his favorite things to photograph--resting on his knee, drumming on the dashboard to his favorite song, tangled in Steve's hair. He aches so badly to photograph them now but his camera is all the way in the driveway, resting on the passenger seat of his car, and they don't have much time.

Steve will be here soon, and Jonathan's heart sinks as he remembers their disagreement: Why should she learn to fight? She'll always have one of us around. The words leave nausea curling in his stomach but wrapping Nancy's hands, running his fingers over the sharp ridges of her knuckles, makes him just a little less sick. Not a princess, he reminds himself, pressing the last bit of tape into place. A warrior. Maybe Steve is right but the fear drags icy fingers down his spine in the middle of the night and all he wants is for everyone he loves to be safe.

He demonstrates how to punch, how to put all your power into your fist: the step forward, the slight twist at the waist, the tender places to hit, and he thinks bitterly that maybe being Lonnie's son finally has some advantage. Nancy is small and slight and it's a good thing she's a great shot because she isn't much of a brawler, but her knuckles are bony and sharp. She won't leave anyone unconscious, Jonathan muses as he rubs his jaw, but she'll buy herself enough time to run.

He can see she hates hitting him but he kisses her wrapped knuckles after every blow, smiling at her over the backs of her hands, and

although her returning smiles are slow, they always come. Jonathan has just released her hands when Steve's voice freezes them both in place, Jonathan's heart flip-flopping. Steve's nail bat is slung over his shoulder like a warrior's club, and Jonathan muses that perhaps it is. He's carrying a 12-pack in his other hand, and when he reaches Jonathan the kiss he presses to his lips is hard and determined, a promise and an apology that leaves him breathless and wanting.

By the time he's gathered himself enough to turn, Nancy has already shotgunned a beer and Steve is holding one out to him. He clinks his can against Steve's and opens it, slurping through the hole punched by the can opener. He didn't know how to do this until Nancy showed him, but now it's become something of a tradition when they're about to do something that reminds them of that other place.

Even now, when the gate is closed, they can't seem to escape the threat of looming darkness. Jonathan carries a weight behind his breastbone but at least he knows his lovers share it. He knows that Nancy counts his breaths when he lies next to her and that Steve plays connect-the-dots with his freckles and he'll never understand how the freak with the camera became the light in the dark.

The beer settles warm and bubbling in his belly and he brings out the tape to wrap Steve's knuckles just like he did for Nancy. His knuckles are bigger, less sharp but no less beautiful, and he thinks he should photograph Steve's hands more. He plants a kiss to them before he lets go, and his face heats up under Steve's heavy gaze. He never imagined this would happen, never thought he would go from no lovers to two who understand him so well, and so he wraps their hands and kisses their knuckles and teaches them to throw punches as vicious as his father's.

He never wrapped his own hands, and when the skin of his knuckles split Steve insists they switch to what he laughingly calls batting practice. He's seen Nancy swing a bat and he's right in assuming Jonathan isn't much better. Jonathan remembers sinking the nails into the wood, remembers how Steve wielded it like a warrior come to their rescue and he knows he would be dead if Steve was a lesser man. He swells with pride to see him with the weapon he crafted. It feels foreign in his hands but Steve adjusts his grip and squeezes his shoulder in approval when bark splinters from the tree in the

Wheelers' backyard.

Nancy isn't quite as strong but she's more confident, and as the sun sinks behind the trees they each shotgun another beer and Nancy is promising to teach them to shoot but Jonathan silences her by following a trail of sweat with his tongue, all the way from her hairline to her collarbone. They're safe, outside in the growing dark, and as his tongue trails down Nancy's neck he feels Steve's fingers questing beneath his shirt.

Jonathan pulls them both closer, watches with a soft smile and wandering hands as Nancy kisses Steve deeply. She's looking at him out of the corner of her eye, and with a quiet, happy hum he leans forward and his tongue darts in to trace the meeting of their mouths. They sink back, a tangled heap of tired sweaty limbs and scraping teeth, and sometimes it's easy to see the similarity between fighting and loving.